4

the fourth volume

orange

【オレンジ】

高野苺

TAKANO ICHIGO presents
ACTION COMICS
published by FUTABASHA

ALL OF US HAD REGRETS ABOUT KAKERU.

IT WASN'T JUST ME AND SUWA.

...I WONDER IF HE WOULD BELIEVE US.

IF WE TOLD KAKERU...

CHAPTER 13

MORNING.

GOOD MORNING!
KAKERU, YOU LOOK MORE HANDSOME THAN USUAL TODAY!
WHAT THE HECK? COMING FROM YOU, YUCK!
SHE'S RIGHT. YOU'RE A HOTTIE!
WHAT ABOUT ME?!
NORMAL!
HEY!
HUH?

ISN'T THIS NORMAL?
About five pages...
HOW LONG IS YOURS, NAHO?
YOU THINK?
EH?
AREN'T ALL OF YOUR LETTERS KIND OF SHORT?
I GUESS THAT'S WHY MINE IS OVER TEN PAGES.
IT SAYS WHAT HAPPENS ON THAT DAY, WHAT I SHOULD DO, WITH LOTS OF DETAILS...
MINE HAS ENTRIES FOR INDIVIDUAL DAYS.
WHAT DO ALL OF YOUR LETTERS SAY?
Ha ha ha!
EVEN TEN YEARS FROM NOW, YOU'RE A HARD WORKER.
WOW! THAT'S JUST LIKE YOU, NAHO!
Ha ha ha!
Over ten pages!

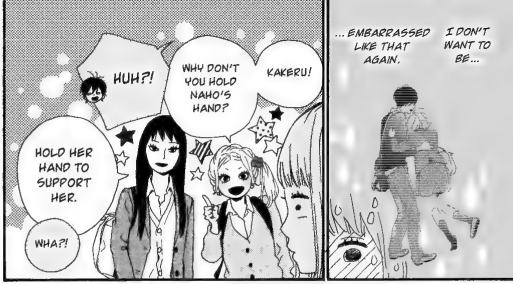
THEY SAW TO "COOPERATE SO KAKERU AND NAHO CAN BE CLOSE FOREVER."
MY LETTER SAYS...
"SUPPORT NAHO, NOT UEDA-SEMPAI."
NAHO, I'M SORRY!
?
Good grief.
AND YET, YOU WERE CHEERING UEDA-SEMPAI ON?
WELL, AFTER ALL...
...I DIDN'T BELIEVE IN THE LETTER THEN!

I THOUGHT IT WAS A PRANK AT FIRST.
I MEAN, THE LETTER ALSO SAYS THAT NAHO FALLS IN LOVE WITH KAKERU...
...BUT I NEVER THOUGHT NAHO WOULD FALL FOR ANYONE.
I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN...
BUT WHEN KAKERU STARTED GOING OUT WITH UEDA-SEMPAI...
...NAHO BEGAN ACTING WEIRD
THAT'S WHEN...
...I FINALLY REALIZED THE LETTER WAS THE REAL DEAL.
AND I FELT BAD FOR NOT BEING SUPPORTIVE OF NAHO BACK THEN.
BUT FROM NOW, YOU'VE GOT MY FULL SUPPORT!
HUH?!
WE DON'T WANT TO HAVE ANY MORE REGRETS.
RIGHT.

I'LL BE FINE WITHOUT ALL YOUR SUPPORT!
Really?
HEY, WAIT!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
I THINK...
...IT'S CONNECTED TO SAVING KAKERU.
SAVING KAKERU?
I'M SURE YOU'RE THE ONLY PERSON WHO CAN MAKE HIM HAPPY.
ME...?
BUT...
...IT'S REALLY HARD.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I SHOULD DO.
THAT'S SIMPLE.

WHEN I SAY "GOOD MORNING" TO KAKERU...
...HE ISN'T ESPECIALLY PLEASED.
BUT WHEN YOU TELL HIM "GOOD MORNING," HE IS ESPECIALLY PLEASED.
NO...
GET IT?!
I GET IT.
A GUY IS HAPPY JUST TO GET A TEXT FROM THE GIRL HE LIKES.
SO EVEN A GREETING WOULD DO IT.
Though it's never happened to me...
IF I SEND KAKERU A TEXT...
...YOU THINK HE'LL BE HAPPY?
SURE I DO.

THE WORRIES I WAS CARRYING AROUND BY MYSELF NO LONGER SEEM SO REAL.
MY WHOLE MINDSET HAS CHANGED.
IT FEELS LIKE A WEIGHT HAS BEEN LIFTED OFF MY CHEST.
THE DOUBTS I HAD UP TO YESTERDAY...
...AREN'T JUST MINE ANYMORE.
WHAT'S UP, NAHO? YOU'RE JUST STANDING THERE.
ARE YOU GOING TO CHANGE INTO YOUR SLIPPERS?
AH...
YEAH.
I DIDN'T WANT TO STUMBLE INTO YOU AGAIN LIKE LAST TIME...
...SO I THOUGHT I'D PUT THEM ON AFTER YOU MOVED AWAY.
...


HUH?!
WHY DON'T YOU HOLD NAHO'S HAND?
KAKERU!
HOLD HER HAND TO SUPPORT HER.
WHA?!
... EMBARRASSED LIKE THAT AGAIN.
I DON'T WANT TO BE...

I'M GOING ON AHEAD.
WHY SHOULD WE HOLD HANDS?

Shut up.
HE RAN AWAY!

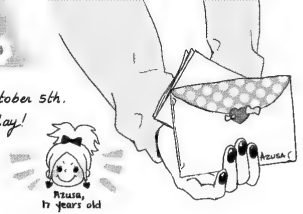
KAKERU!
G...
GOOD MORNING!

...Huh?
YOU SAID THAT BEFORE, RIGHT?
WHY SAY IT AGAIN?
I...
I KNOW, BUT...
...MY TIMING WAS, UM...
Ha!
Ha ha ha!

IT'S TRUE.
AH...
HEY!
I BORROWED A BATON.
Let's practice!
Pshu!
...TOLD EVERYONE ABOUT HIS TROUBLES...
MAYBE IF KAKERU...
...IT WOULD LIGHTEN HIS LOAD.

NOTHING, REALLY!
WE WERE DECIDING ON THE ORDER OF THE RELAY RUNNERS.
GOTCHA!
SO EVERYONE FOLLOW MY LEAD, ALL RIGHT?
WHAT ARE YOU GUYS WHISPERING ABOUT?
OH...?
?
SO WHAT'S THE ORDER?
WELL...
?

Don't forget October 5th.
It's my birthday!

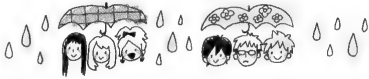


After school that day, everyone will give you a birthday present. As I recall, right after you all decide to walk home together, it starts to rain.

Naho has her own folding umbrella and Kakeru says, "Let me under there."

By coincidence, Hazita's present to me is a folding umbrella, which I lend to Kakeru.

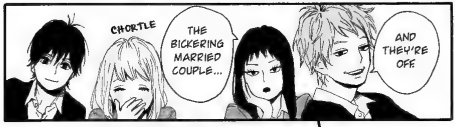
In the end, we walk home with Taka-chan and me sharing Naho's umbrella while Kakeru, Suwa, and Hazita share the one Hazita gave me.



I wonder what would've happened if I hadn't lent my umbrella.

AZU! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
So don't let Kakeru borrow your umbrella!
AAAH! WHAT?! I HAD NO IDEA!

HEY, HAGITA.
HM?
WHY'D YOU GIVE ME AN UMBRELLA?
YOU SHOULDN'T GIVE ME AN UMBRELLA!
I COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE, SO JUST ROLL WITH IT!
WHAT, IS THIS?! IT'S SO CUTE!
THEN DON'T COMPLAIN ABOUT IT.


AND THEY'RE OFF.
THE BICKERING MARRIED COUPLE...
CHORTLE

AH.
RAIN.
SSSSHHHH
WELL, THIS SUCKS.
DRIP
DRIP

POP
POP
POP
WAIT.
WHY ARE ALL YOU GUYS CARRYING UMBRELLAS?
THE WEATHER REPORT CALLED FOR RAIN.
IT DID NOT! IT SAID SUNNY!
LET ME SHARE WITH YOU.
FORGET IT!
WHY NOT?
OKAY, THEN... HAGITA-KUN...
WHY?
UGH... COME ON...

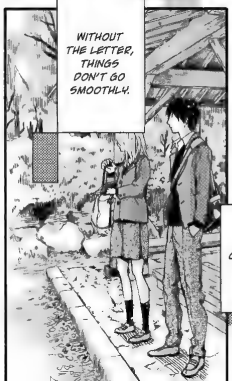
AZU! LEND ME YOUR UMBRELLA.
NO WAY!
WHY NOT? YOU JUST GOT A NEW ONE FROM HAGITA-KUN.
LET ME USE ONE OF THEM.
NO!
I'M GOING TO TREASURE THIS, NOT USE IT!
DO YOU KNOW HOW RARE IT IS TO GET A PRESENT FROM HAGITA?
NEVER MIND!
WHAT'S THE POINT IF YOU DON'T USE IT?
KAKERU...

I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU.
I'LL SHARE WITH AZU...
WANT TO USE MINE?
SHARE WITH ME...
LET'S WALK HOME TOGETHER.
HUH?
EH...?
UM...

SURE.
WALKING TOGETHER LIKE THIS...
NOW THAT'S A SHARED UMBRELLA!
#SSSSS
...MEANS THAT...
...OUR SHOULDERS CAN'T HELP BUT BRUSH AGAINST EACH OTHER...
A LITTLE FURTHER.
MAYBE THIS'LL DO IT.

NAHO...
TSUN
DON'T STAND SO FAR AWAY.
EH?
YOU'LL GET WET.
EH?
SCOOCH CLOSER TO ME.
!
FUWA
MY FACE...
AAAH!

THE UMBRELLA...
S...
SORRY...
YOU STARTLED ME...


WITHOUT THE LETTER, THINGS DON'T GO SMOOTHLY.
SHALL WE TAKE SHELTER FROM THE RAIN?
THIS WON'T WORK.
OF COURSE NOT.

KAKERU... TRY USING THIS.
A HANDKERCHIEF.
OH!
DON'T WORRY, IT'S A NEW ONE!
YOU USE IT, NAHO.
I HAVE ANOTHER ONE, SO...
WHY, TWO?
THANKS.
SORRY...
REALLY...
IT'S OKAY.
IT WAS MY FAULT, TOO.
YOU DIDN'T LIKE...
...SHARING AN UMBRELLA?

SORRY.
I WAS JUST NERVOUS.
THAT'S NOT IT.
IT'S THE MOST NERVOUS I'VE BEEN SO FAR...
I DON'T THINK MY HEART HAS EVER BEATEN FASTER...
WE WERE SO CLOSE... OUR VOICES SO CLOSE...
IS THIS WHAT IT FEELS LIKE WHEN YOU'RE DATING?

WELL... IF IT IS...
IT WASN'T UNPLEASANT.
IT WASN'T UNPLEASANT FOR ME, EITHER.
SAME GOES FOR WHEN YOU LOST YOUR BALANCE...
...WHILE PUTTING ON YOUR SHOES... AND GRABBED ME FOR SUPPORT.

I... I DOUBT IT.
I'M SURE THAT WAS A BOTHER.
IT WASN'T A BOTHER AT ALL.
IN FACT...
...IT MADE ME PRETTY HAPPY.
WHAT AM I SAYING?
This is embarrassing...
KAKERU...

HE COMMUNICATES HIS FEELINGS SO CLEARLY.
KAKERU IS ALWAYS OPEN.
ALWAYS STRAIGHT-FORWARD.
"LET'S HOLD HANDS."
BUT HE WASN'T ABLE TO SAY,
MAYBE HE'S...
...JUST LIKE ME.
MAYBE KAKERU...
...WAS NERVOUS, TOO.

I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY ONE...
...WHO WAS ANXIOUS ALL THE TIME.

I WON'T TAKE IT.
THAT'S ENOUGH.
AFTER ALL...
...WE ALREADY HELP HANDS AT THE SCHOOL FESTIVAL.
ONCE IS ENOUGH?

KAKERU...

HE'S BLUSHING.
SORRY.

...IF YOU DON'T SAY ANYTHING, I WON'T KNOW THAT YOU WANT TO!
WELL, AFTER ALL...
YOU USUALLY WON'T HOLD HANDS WITH ME...
...SO I WAS BEING MEAN.

...I BET I'M BLUSHING MORE THAN HE IS.
WANNA GO OUT?
BUT...
HUH?
IF YOU SAY, "LET'S GO OUT"...
...THEN WE'LL GO OUT.
THAT'S OKAY.

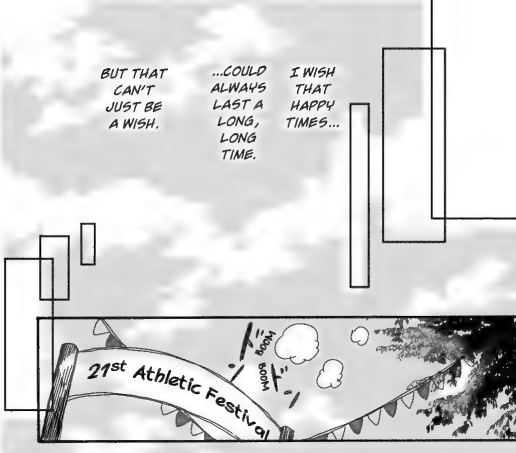
I'M HAPPY...
...EVEN IF WE DON'T GO OUT.
YEAH.
ME, TOO.
BUT THE TRUTH IS...

MAYBE THAT WOULD...
...MAKE US EVEN HAPPIER.
...I KIND OF WANT TO TRY GOING OUT WITH HIM.
CLOSER.
STEP
NAHO, COME OVER HERE MORE.
?!
CLOSER.
EH?
CLOSER.
CLOSER.

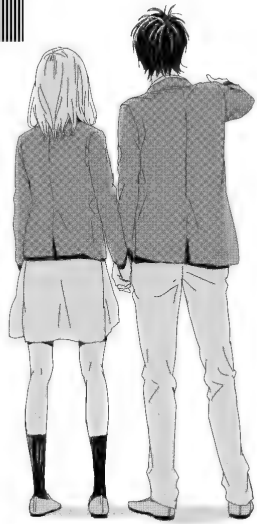
IF YOU DON'T DO A GOOD JOB DRYING YOURSELF, YOU'LL BE SOAKED.
AAAH!
WIPE
THAT'S OKAY! I'M FINE!
I'LL DRY MYSELF!
I WONDER HOW THOSE TWO ARE DOING.

GOOD POINT.
CONSIDERING THOSE TWO.
WITH THOSE TWO, WALKING TOGETHER UNDER ONE UMBRELLA IS A BREAK-THROUGH.
MAYBE THEY HAD A BREAK-THROUGH!
THEY ALWAYS WALK A CERTAIN DISTANCE APART...
...EVEN THOUGH THEY OUGHT TO BE CLOSER.
SO...
...SEEING THEM LIKE THAT MADE ME HAPPY.

I JUST HOPE...
...WE GET TO SEE THEM LIKE THAT TEN YEARS FROM NOW.
ME, TOO.
SUWA, GIMME A FEW OF YOUR FRIES.
THAT'S MORE THAN A FEW!
THERE IT IS!
HAGITA'S MOOCH ATTACK!
CRAM


BUT THAT CAN'T JUST BE A WISH.
...COULD ALWAYS LAST A LONG, LONG TIME.
I WISH THAT HAPPY TIMES...
21st Athletic Festival
BOOM
BOOM

Naho Takamiya
ガラ
SHOVE



CHAPTER 14

Sign: 21st Athletic Festival
NAHO...
THE OPENING CEREMONY IS ABOUT TO START.
YEAH.
WHAT WERE YOU DOING?
THEY ASKED ME TO BE IN CHARGE OF FIRST AID, SO I WAS RUNNING AROUND FOR THAT.
A GOFER AGAIN? ha ha ha!
HERE.
I'LL TIE IT FOR YOU.
HM?
HUH?

WAA!
IT'S FINE. JUST COME HERE.
THAT'S...
TH...
THERE.
GOT IT.
I FEEL LIKE...

OCTOBER 14TH

THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL.
A SLIGHTLY HOT, CLEAR FALL DAY.

OUR CLASS IS IN RED.

MOM AND DAD CAME TO SEE IT.
NAHO...
YOUR MOM AND DAD ARE HERE.
Ah!
THERE THEY ARE!
AWWW... NAHO'S PARENTS MAKE SUCH A GREAT COUPLE.
THEY LOOK SO NICE!
LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING!
HAGITA'S FOLKS ARE LIKE MIRROR IMAGES OF EACH OTHER!
Ha ha ha!
THE ONE ON THE RIGHT! YOU KNOW THAT!
WHICH ONE IS YOUR MOM, AGAIN?
Looks like he's an actor and she's a model!
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN TAKAKO'S PARENTS.
HA HA!
MOM, THOSE SUNGLASSES ARE TOO BIG!
AH! AZU, I FOUND YOUR MOM AND LITTLE SISTER!
WORKING.
Baking bread!
WHERE'S YOUR DAD?

SUWA, AZU, TAKA-CHAN, AND HAGITA-KUN ALL HAD FAMILY MEMBERS THERE TO WATCH, BUT NO ONE FROM KAKERU'S FAMILY CAME.

AND MY GRANDMA'S AROUND, BUT I DIDN'T BOTHER TELLING HER ABOUT IT.
MY PARENTS DIVORCED WHEN I WAS IN KINDERGARTEN, AND MY DAD IS TOTALLY OUT OF THE PICTURE.
MY MOM IS WORKING TODAY.

ON TOP OF THAT, HE FELL DURING THE RELAY. I'M SURE THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL DIDN'T BECOME A PLEASANT MEMORY FOR HIM.

I'LL NEVER FORGET THE LOOK ON KAKERU'S FACE AFTER THE RELAY. HE WAS ALMOST AT THE POINT OF TEARS.

THE BLUE TEAM WON THE COMPETITION.

BRING A RELATIVE OF KAKERU'S TO THE FESTIVAL.
MAKE SURE HE HAS FUN, AND DOESN'T FEEL LIKE CRYING.
KAKERU!

YOU CAME?!
SORRY, I SHOULD'VE ASKED YOU...
NO, I DON'T MIND, BUT HOW DID YOU...?
GRANDMA?!

I WAS INVITED.
?
MY DAD ASKED HER IF SHE WANTED A LIFT.
YOU GUYS LIVE FAR FROM HERE, AND I HEARD YOUR GRANDMA DOESN'T DRIVE, SO...
HIROTO ASKED ME TO CALL HER.
YEAH!
THANK YOU. YOU MADE MY DAY!
DID I DO OKAY?
YOU DID, SUWA?

I'M SO RELIEVED.
IT LOOKS LIKE FOLLOWING THE LETTER'S ADVICE HAS WORKED OUT THIS TIME.
GOOD.

ALL SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS, PLEASE GATHER AT THE DESIGNATED AREA.
AND NOW, THE SECOND-YEAR TUG OF WAR.
NOW IT'S MY TURN TO STEP UP.
SUWA DID HIS PART.
I HOPE KAKERU HAS A GOOD TIME.

WHAT IS IT, MOM?
NAHO!
I DON'T NEED ALL THAT!
DO YOU HAVE A HANDKERCHIEF AND TISSUES?
I'VE ALREADY GOT A HANDKERCHIEF AND TISSUES.
AND BAND-AIDS?
Here.
...WHICH ONE OF THOSE BOYS DO YOU LIKE?
TELL YOU WHAT, I'LL TAKE THE BAND-AIDS.
ALSO...
GIGGLE
I DON'T LIKE... ...ANY OF...
WHY?!
EH?!

HE'S LOOKING OVER HERE!!
And she's looking over there!!
I SEE. THAT BOY, HUH?
AAAAH!

KAKERU!
WHAT'S WRONG?
I KEPT CALLIN' YOUR NAME. YOU COULDN'T HEAR ME?
HUH?
SORRY. I WAS SPACING OUT.
WHAT? DO YOU FEEL SICK?
DON'T PUSH YOURSELF TOO HARD BE HONEST.
I'M FINE!
ARE YOU SURE?

...HUH?
TWEET
THE RESULTS OF THE SECOND-YEAR TUG OF WAR ARE...
TWO WINS FOR BLUE. ONE WIN FOR YELLOW. ZERO WINS FOR RED!
AS OF RIGHT NOW, THE BLUE TEAM IS IN THE LEAD!
TEAM
TEAM

SO FRUS-TRATING!
DAMMIT! WE LOST!
WE LOST BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE!
EVEN WITH ME THERE, WE COULDN'T DO IT.
KAKERU...

ARE YOU FEELING DOWN?
ニコ
SMILE

KAKERU!
YOUR GRANDMA'S CALLING FOR YOU.
I WONDER WHY.
?
THANKS, SUWA.
NO PROB.

I KNOW. HE LOOKS GLOOMY.
IS KAKERU OKAY?
I THINK...
...HE WISHES HIS MOM COULD BE HERE TODAY.
THIS IS ALL BECAUSE I INVITED HIM TO HANG OUT WITH US ON THAT FIRST DAY.
I'M SORRY. IF I'D BELIEVED THE LETTER, I COULD'VE CHANGED WHAT HAPPENED.
ME, TOO... I'M SORRY.
YEAH.
IT'S PROBABLY HARD TO BELIEVE A LETTER LIKE THAT AT FIRST.
KAKERU SAID...
...HIS MOM IS WORKING TODAY, RIGHT?
I GUESS HE'S HIDING WHAT HAPPENED TO HER...
...FROM US.

IF KAKERU WON'T TELL US WHAT HE'S FEELING...
...HOW CAN WE KNOW WHAT TO DO FOR HIM?
KAKERU...
ARE YOU UNDER THE WEATHER?
YOU LOOK A LITTLE OUT OF SORTS.
HUH?
REALLY?
I FEEL FINE.

OH? WELL, IF YOU SAY SO...
SUWA-SAN SAID HE'S TAKING SOME PHOTOS OF YOU.
I'M CAPTURING ALL OF YOUR MANLY MOMENTS, KAKERU-KUN!
SO KEEP IT UP FOR THE NEXT EVENT!
SERIOUS-LY?!
That's kind of embarrassing...
...I'VE ONLY BEEN TO ONE OF YOUR ATHLETIC FESTIVALS, WHEN YOU WERE IN KINDERGARTEN.
BEFORE THIS...
YEAH.
YOU CAME TO TOKYO TO SEE IT.
I WANT YOU...
...TO HAVE A GOOD TIME TODAY, KAKERU.
BECAUSE YOUR MOTHER'S WATCHING, TOO.

...YEAH.
THIS COULD BE A HARD DAY FOR KAKERU.
...THERE ARE MOTHERS EVERYWHERE.
IF YOU LOOK OUT OVER THE GROUNDS...
I'VE ALSO ALWAYS FELT REGRET...
...THAT WE COULDN'T SAVE KAKERU'S MOM.
SUWA TURNS COOL WHEN HE TAKES OFF HIS SHIRT!
LOOK AT THOSE MUSCLES!
SUWA, MY GOD!

QUIT MAKIN' FUN OF ME.
WE'RE TOTALLY NOT!
ALL THE GIRLS COME TO THIS FESTIVAL JUST SO THEY CAN WATCH THE BO-TAOSHI EVENT!
HUH?
KYAA!
Suwa-senpai is a hunk!
He's so hot!

bo-taoshi: pole-toppling game

LOOK, THE FRESHMEN ARE GATHERING AROUND TO WATCH, TOO!
Even though they're on the J blue team.
THEY ALWAYS DO THAT WITH THE SOCCER CLUB.

I... I AM NOT!
YOU'RE EMBARRASSED.
YOU'RE BLUSHING DOWN TO YOUR NECK.
THAT'S JUST SUNBURN!
I'VE GOT WAY MORE DEFINITION THAN YOU, KAKERU!
WHAT THE...?! HE DREW A SIX-PACK ON HIMSELF!
HEY! DON'T UNDERESTIMATE ME!
I'll get next to Hagita-kun.
I DON'T WANNA STAND NEXT TO SUWA.
PFFT
WAIT A SECOND. PERMANENT MARKER?
SO THAT'S WHAT YOU WANTED THE PERMANENT MARKER FOR!
HA HA HA!

KAKERU...
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
MMF...
KAKERU...
THAT'S NOW WHAT I MEANT.
I KNOW I DON'T HAVE MUSCLES LIKE SUWA, AND I CAN'T BE RELIED ON FOR...
NOT THAT.
HUH?
DO YOU THINK I LOOK WEAK?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

TH...
THAT'S CLOSE...
SORRY.

Hug him, you dolt!
IN JUST A MOMENT, THE BOYS' BO-TAOSHI EVENT WILL BEGIN.
ALL BOYS PLEASE ASSEMBLE AT THE CENTER OF THE GROUNDS.

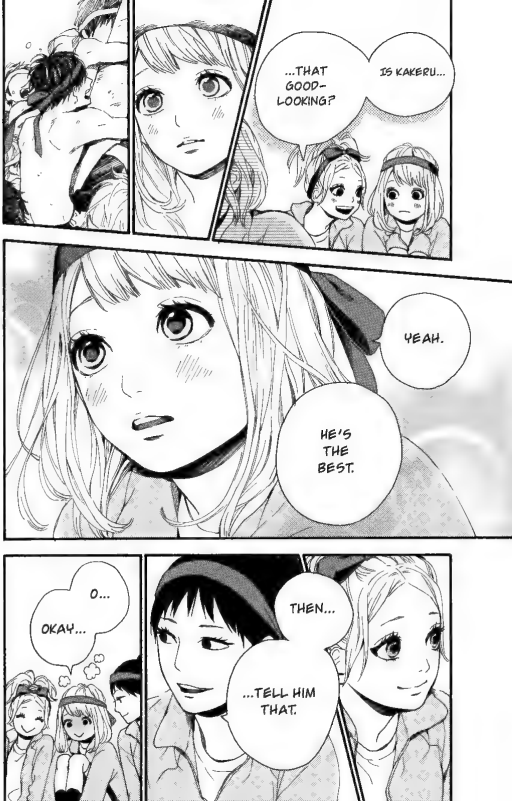
THIS TIME...
...THE LETTER'S ADVICE DIDN'T WORK WELL, EITHER.
...I BET KAKERU WASN'T ABLE TO STAY FOCUSED FOR THE RELAY, EITHER.
IF HE WAS LIKE THIS THEN...
...BEFORE THE RELAY STARTS.
I WANT TO DO SOMETHING TO HELP...
HEY, KAKERU.

AREN'T YOU WORRIED?
ABOUT NOT GOING OUT WITH NAHO.
WORRIED?
WELL, WHAT IF SOME OTHER GUY TELLS HER HE'S IN LOVE WITH HER?
AREN'T YOU WORRIED SHE'LL START DATING SOMEONE ELSE?
OH, THAT.
I'D BE MORE WORRIED IF WE DID DATE.
WHY'S THAT?
AFTER ALL...
...I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I'LL BE HERE.

AND THAT'D BE HARD ON NAHO.
I MIGHT MOVE AGAIN.
MAYBE TO TOKYO... MAYBE SOMEWHERE FARTHER AWAY.
IF WE STARTED DATING, I MIGHT SUDDENLY DISAPPEAR.
KAKERU.
HOW DO YOU REALLY FEEL?
WHAT IF YOU DID GO AWAY AND SOMEBODY ELSE SNATCHED UP NAHO?
...THAT'S WHY YOU TWO AREN'T GOIN' OUT?
ARE YOU TELLIN' ME...

YOU WOULDN'T MIND...
...IF I WENT OUT WITH NAHO?
NOPE.
IN FACT, I THINK THAT'D BE A GOOD IDEA.

GASP
NAHO...
YOU HAD YOUR EYE ON KAKERU THE WHOLE TIME!
NAHO REALLY DOES PREFER KAKERU OVER SUWA, RIGHT?


...THAT GOOD-LOOKING?
IS KAKERU...
YEAH.
HE'S THE BEST.
O...
OKAY...
THEN...
...TELL HIM THAT.

...SO I DON'T HAVE REGRETS LATER.
I HAVE TO GET THAT ACROSS...
THE RED TEAM WINS!
OW...
THAT HURTS...
SUWA!
ARE YOU OKAY?!
YOU'RE ALL SCRATCHED UP!
BLAME THE WOODEN POLE.

SUWA'S TALL AND LOOKS STRONG...
...SO IT SEEMS THE SENIORS TARGETED HIM.
I CAN'T SEE A THING WITHOUT MY GLASSES.
THEN WHY DID YOU TAKE THEM OFF?
HAGITA, YOU DON'T HAVE A SCRATCH!
THERE'S A FIRST-AID STATION, RIGHT?
IT'S GOTTA BE AROUND HERE.
NAH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.
I'll just go wash up.
I KNOW WHERE IT IS.
I'M IN CHARGE OF FIRST-AID!
OWWW!

WIMP.
I CAN'T TAKE THIS SPECIFIC TYPE OF PAIN!
SORRY.
I'M ALMOST DONE...
...SO JUST HANG IN THERE.

AH!
ARE YOU HURT?
HOW ABOUT YOU, KAKERU?
YOU'VE GOT A SCRAPE ON YOUR ARM!
OH... THIS IS NOTHING.
BUT WE SHOULD STILL PUT A BAND-AID ON IT!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT.
LET ME SEE IT!

I SAID...
...I'M FINE!
...
SORRY...
STEP

...SUWA?
WHAT SHOULD I DO...
KAKERU NEEDS TO HAVE FUN TODAY, AND YET...
DID I DO SOMETHING WRONG?
...I THINK THIS IS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.
AS A MATTER OF FACT...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THAT, NAHO.

"YOU WOULDN'T MIND...
...IF I WENT OUT WITH NAHO?"

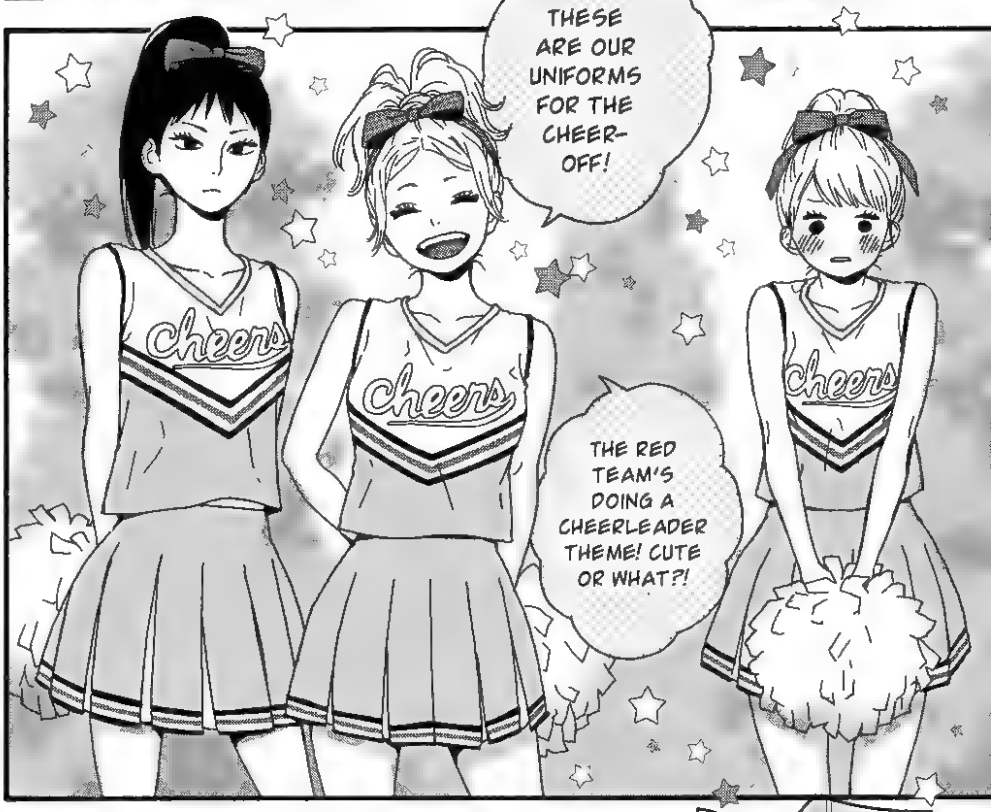
"IN FACT, I THINK THAT'D BE A GOOD IDEA."

"NOPE."

I SAID THAT, AND YET I FEEL SO...

CHAPTER 15

PSSH!
HEADS UP!


THESE ARE OUR UNIFORMS FOR THE CHEER-OFF!
THE RED TEAM'S DOING A CHEERLEADER THEME! CUTE OR WHAT?!
Cheers
Cheers
Cheers

UGH... THIS IS EMBAR-RASSING...
The skirt's short...
Cheers

NOT REALLY...
NOT AT ALL!
YOU DUMBO!
OF COURSE YOU'RE NOT CUTE!

MAN, THOSE SKIRTS! DID YOU SEE HOW SHORT...?!
SO FRIGGIN' SHORT!
PFFF
LET'S GO.
THOSE JERKS.
AT LEAST BE NICE AND SAY WE LOOK CUTE!
THIS AFTERNOON, FOR THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL...
...WE'LL LEAD OFF WITH THE GIRLS' CHEERING BATTLE.
I DON'T WANT IT!
...SO I'LL GIVE YOU ONE OF AZU, HAGITA.
I TOLD MY DAD TO GET SOME SHOTS...

I'LL GIVE YOU NAHO'S PIC, KAKERU.
THANKS...
I WONDER IF KAKERU WAS MAD...
WHAT DID SUWA MEAN BY "THE RIGHT DIRECTION"?
ARE THINGS REALLY OKAY?
Cheers
Cheers
Cheers

NA...
HEY!

...
Sorry... Another odd job...
THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT YOU TO CARRY.
TAKAMIYA, NARUSE...

ACCORDING TO NAHO'S LETTER, AFTER KAKERU FELL AND WE LOST, HE BLAMED HIMSELF, RIGHT?
IT'D BE WEIRD IF WE SAID BEFORE THE RACE, "DON'T WORRY IF YOU FALL," HUH?
HUH? WHERE ARE NAHO AND KAKERU?
THEY WERE ENLISTED.
I HOPE WE CAN PULL OFF THE RELAY...
I THINK...
...KAKERU'S LEG IS ALREADY HURT.
EVEN IF WE SAID, "CAREFUL YOU DON'T FALL"...
...IT'S NOT LIKE THAT WOULD BE ENOUGH TO CHANGE THE FUTURE.
SO... SO WHAT DO WE DO?

NO...
IT'S IN MY LETTER.
NO WAY!
YOU MEAN FROM THE POLE-TOP PLING?
DID KAKERU SAY ANY-THING?
IT SEEMS HE DIDN'T TELL ANY OF US ABOUT BEING HURT.
HERE IT IS IN MINE...
THE FUTURE ME NOTICED IT BEFORE THE RACE...
...BUT KAKERU SAID HE WAS FINE, SO I DIDN'T STOP HIM.
WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SOMETHING BEFORE?!
YOU WERE AT THE FIRST-AID STATION WITH HIM!
"WHY," YOU ASK...

ANYWAY, LET'S GET OVER TO HIM!
?
...

CARRYING A MATTRESS IS TOUGH WITH TWO PEOPLE.
YEAH...
IT'S HEAVY FOR ME, TOO.
LET'S PUT IT DOWN A SEC.

UGH...
THIS IS HEAVY...
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, NAHO?

IDIOT.
GRAB

HOW DID YOU...?
...
...
TELL US!
YOUR LEG IS HURT?
HURT?
I'M SORRY.
WE DIDN'T REALIZE IT BEFORE.

KAKERU.
IS THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL BORING FOR YOU?
OH, IT'S...
...NO BIG DEAL...
...AND WONDERED IF SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED.
...
WE WERE TALKING ABOUT HOW DOWN YOU SEEM...
WHY?
NOT AT ALL.

IT'S MUCH BETTER THAN...
...STEWING OVER THINGS ALONE.
IT WAS THE SAME THING WITH ME.
WE'D ALL BE HAPPY TO LEND AN EAR.
"TALK TO US BECAUSE WE'RE GOOD FRIENDS."
"WE DON'T WANNA GO AROUND JUST SMILIN' AND NOT KNOWING THAT SOMETHIN'S WEIGHING ON YOUR MIND."
I'VE BEEN LYING TO YOU.
I'M SORRY...

THE REAL REASON...
...MY MOM'S NOT HERE...
...IS BECAUSE SHE'S DEAD.
SO THE REASON YOU'RE DOWN...
...IS THAT YOUR MOTHER COULDN'T COME TODAY?
...

I'M...
...NOT SURE IF IT'S OKAY FOR ME TO HAVE FUN.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
EVERY TIME WE'RE TOGETHER...
...YOU GUYS MAKE ME WANT TO LAUGH.
BUT I FELT LIKE I CAN'T BE THAT WAY TODAY.
AFTER ALL, MY MOM COULD BE WATCHING THIS FROM SOME-WHERE.
IF SHE WERE STILL ALIVE, SHE PROBABLY WOULD'VE BEEN HERE.

SHE SHOULD NEVER HAVE DIED.
MY MOM MUST BE SAD RIGHT NO,W WHEREVER SHE IS.
SO I'M NOT SURE IT'S OKAY FOR ME TO LAUGH LIKE I DON'T HAVE A CARE IN THE WORLD.
I'M SURE KAKERU'S BEEN TORMENTED...
...ALL THIS TIME...
...WITH REGRET AND A SENSE OF GUILT.

WHAT CAN I DO...
...TO ERASE THOSE FEELINGS?
BUT IF YOUR MOTHER'S WATCHING THIS FROM SOME-WHERE...
...IT'S BETTER IF YOU DO SMILE, RIGHT?
THAT'S RIGHT.
IF YOU'RE BUMMED OUT...
...YOUR MOTHER WILL WORRY ABOUT YOU, TOO.
WORRY ABOUT ME?
WHY?

YOU MAY NOT KNOW THIS...
SO FIGURE YOUR MOM IS EVEN MORE WORRIED THAN THAT.
...BUT WE'VE BEEN REALLY WORRIED ABOUT YOU.
NAHO'S THE ONE...
...WHO'S ALWAYS LOOKIN' AT KAKERU!
HE ALSO STARES AT YOU ALL THE TIME AND SIGHS.
EVERY TIME SUWA OPENS HIS MOUTH, IT'S "KAKERU THIS" AND "KAKERU THAT."
what is he, a girl?
I DO NOT!

THAT'S RIGHT! FORGET THE CONTESTS! SHE'S WATCHED KAKERU THE WHOLE TIME!
SHE'S SO WORRIED, SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH HERSELF!
HUH?
UH...
IT'S TRUE...
I AM ALWAYS LOOKING AT YOU.
I DO LOOK AT YOU.
BUT I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE.
WELL...
WE'RE NOT TRYING TO FORCE YOU TO SMILE WHEN THINGS ARE ROUGH...

BUT...
...WHEN YOU'RE ACTUALLY HAVING A GOOD TIME, IT'S OKAY TO SMILE.
YOU'VE BEEN LOOKIN' FORWARD TO THE RELAY, RIGHT?
YEAH...
THEN BEFORE THE RACE STARTS...
...GET THAT LEG TREATED.
I'M FINE.
IT DOESN'T HURT THAT MUCH.
YOU'RE NOT FINE.
GO TO FIRST-AID, FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD.

THAT'S OKAY. I CAN CARRY THIS.
WE'LL CARRY THIS THE REST OF THE WAY.
GO WITH NAHO.
UH...
WE'RE TELLING YOU NOT TO OVERDO IT!
IF IT'S HEAVY...
...YOU DON'T HAVE TO STRAIN YOURSELF AND CARRY THE WHOLE THING.
WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

IT'S OKAY.
IF EVERYONE GRABS HOLD, IT'S LIGHT AS A FEATHER.

WE'RE ALL LOOKING AT YOU.
I KNOW IT WON'T BE EASY...
...TO ERASE KAKERU'S REGRET AND ANGUISH...
...BUT...

...I HOPE WE CAN AT LEAST MAKE IT...
...A LITTLE LIGHTER FOR HIM.
A SPRAINED ANKLE?
SERIOUSLY? MAN, YOU CAN'T RUN ON THAT.
SURE I CAN. HE SAID IT WAS JUST A LIGHT SPRAIN.

SENSEI SAID IT'S OKAY IF HE CAN RUN...
...BUT HE SHOULD PROBABLY SIT OUT OF THE RELAY, JUST IN CASE.
BUT HE SAID IT'S OKAY! DON'T SAY THE NEGATIVE PART!
IT DOESN'T EVEN HURT NOW THAT IT'S TAPED UP!
See?
I CAN RUN LIKE CRAZY!
HAGITA-KUN!
YOU AND YOUR "I'M OKAY"!

I WON'T OVERDO IT.
REMEMBER, YOU'VE GOT THE CLUB.
IF YOUR ANKLE GETS WORSE, YOU MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE FOR A WHILE.
I'LL BE FINE.
ARE YOU SURE IT DOESN'T HURT? AND YOU CAN RUN?
I'M TOTALLY FINE.

I'M SURE I WON'T REGRET IT.
WELL...
THEN SHALL WE...
...ALL RUN TOGETHER?
THIS IS GONNA BE FUN!
RIGHT, HAGITA?!
...
WHAT'S WRONG, HAGITA?
MY ANKLE HURTS.
IT COULD BE A SPRAIN.
YOU'RE NOT HURT!

...THE CLASS RELAY RACE!
AND NOW WE COME TO THE FINAL EVENT OF TODAY'S ATHLETIC FESTIVAL...
AZU, NAHO, AND TAKA-CHAN, FIGHT!
GOOD LUCK!
WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU!
WIN THIS, NARUSE!
WHAT?
CHEER FOR ME, TOO.
SUWA, TAKE FIRST PLACE!
KAKERU.

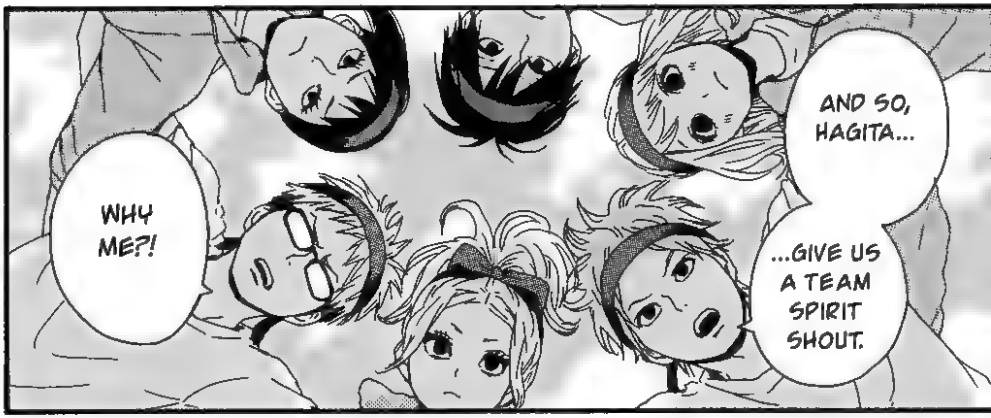
DO YOU...
...WANT TO SWITCH?
I MEAN...
LET'S SWITCH.

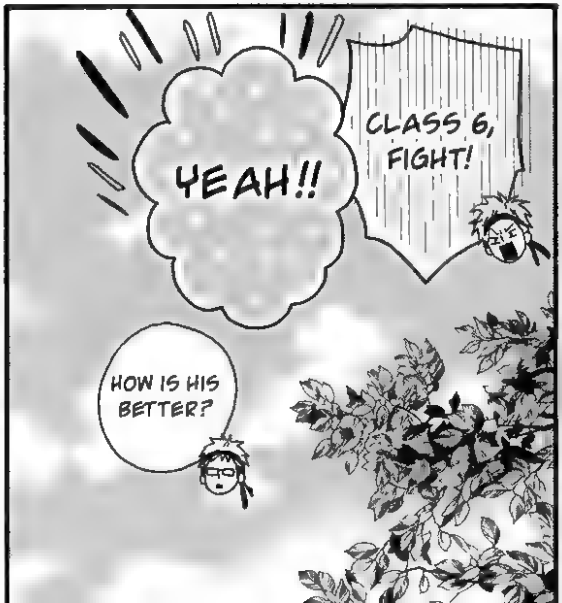
...A GREAT BIG SMILE.

...LET KAKERU HAVE...

CHAPTER 16

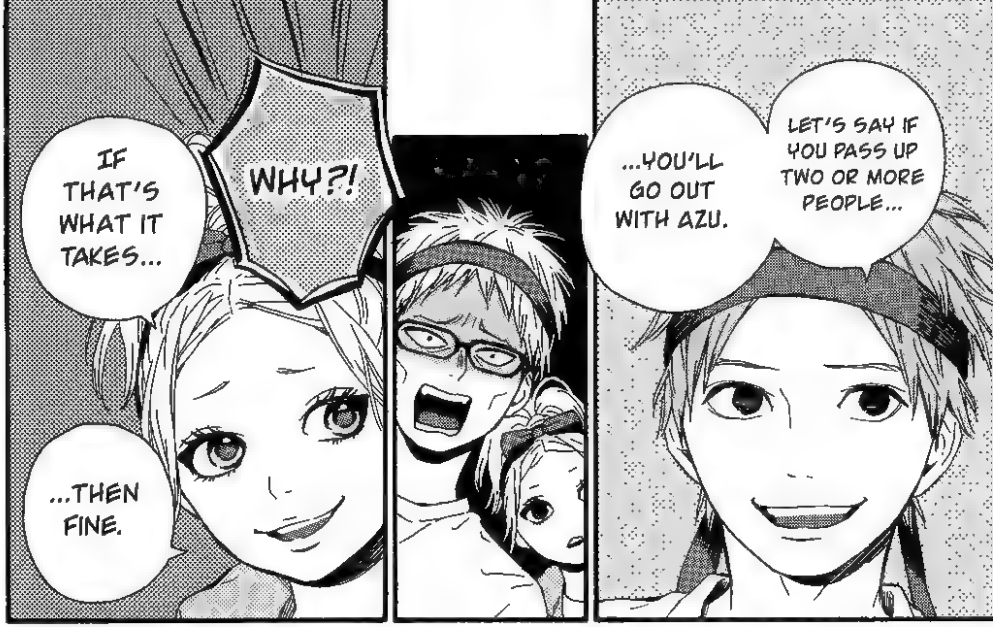
SO YOU'VE GOT NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS HAVE A GOOD TIME RUNNING.
THIS IS WHAT WE'VE BEEN TRAINING FOR, GUYS.
IT'S FINALLY TIME FOR THE RELAY!


WHY ME?!
AND SO, HAGITA...
...GIVE US A TEAM SPIRIT SHOUT.

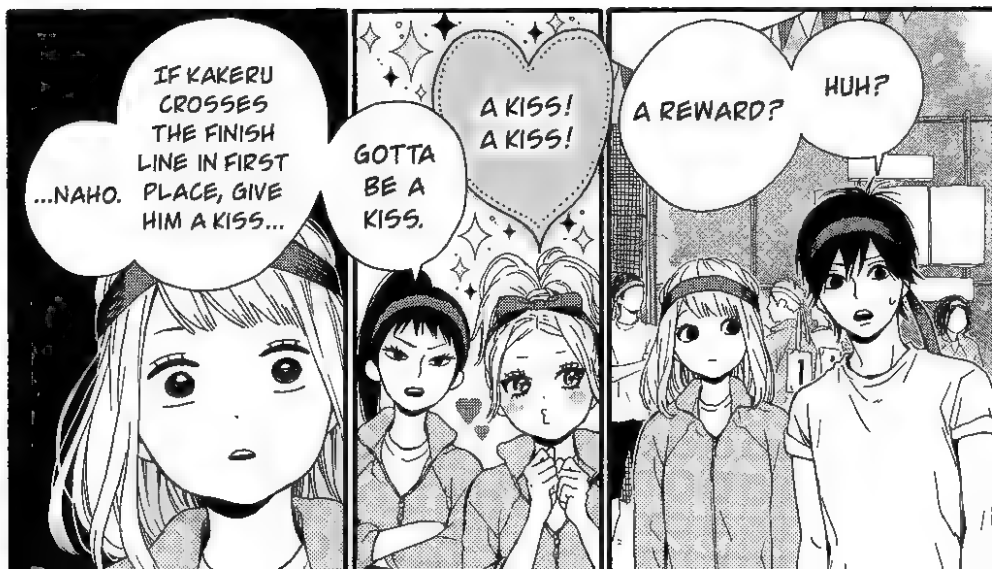

YEAH!!
CLASS 6, FIGHT!
HOW IS HIS BETTER?

...
HEY HEY HO!!

YOU'D BETTER REMEMBER...
...THAT PROMISE.
HEY.
AZU.
6
NO, WE'RE NOT GOIN' OUT!!
YOU TWO WERE PRACTICING TOGETHER AGAIN? ARE YOU GOING OUT?
WELL, YOU OUGHTA.
"THAT PROMISE"?
WHEN WE WERE PRACTICING AT THE PARK YESTERDAY...
...I PROMISED HIM A FREE TREAT FROM MY FAMILY'S BAKERY FOR EVERY PERSON HE PASSES IN THE RELAY.
5


LET'S SAY IF YOU PASS UP TWO OR MORE PEOPLE...
...YOU'LL GO OUT WITH AZU.
WHY?!
IF THAT'S WHAT IT TAKES...
...THEN FINE.

NOT "FINE"!
THAT'S MORE LIKE A PUNISH-MENT!
DON'T ACT SO SHY.
AND HOW ABOUT IF NAHO GIVES KAKERU SOME KIND OF REWARD?
1
4


HUH?
A REWARD?
A KISS! A KISS!
GOTTA BE A KISS.
IF KAKERU CROSSES THE FINISH LINE IN FIRST PLACE, GIVE HIM A KISS...
...NAHO.
1

I LIKE THE IDEA.
BUT IF KAKERU DOESN'T TAKE FIRST PLACE...
...I GET A KISS FROM NAHO!
WHOA, WHOA, WHOA.
What?!
THAT'S ASKING TOO MUCH.
You can tell by Naho's voice...
WHY THE HECK...?
?!
WELL, I'M DEFINITELY COMING IN FIRST.

WE'RE OVER THERE, NAHO.
IT'S GONNA START!
TH-THEY WERE JUST KIDDING, RIGHT?
ピー
TWEET
WE'LL DO OUR PART, TOO!
YOU'VE GOTTA COME IN FIRST!
!?
!?

WE'RE ALL TOGETHER.
NO ONE WILL BLAME YOU.
...IT WON'T BE YOUR FAULT, KAKERU.
EVEN IF SOMETHING HAPPENS...
YOU'RE NOT ALONE.
BANG
READY...

IN THE FIRST LEG, CLASS 6 IS IN THE LEAD.
WOW!
LOOK AT SUWA GO!
RUN!
JUST DO YOUR BEST.
3
TAKAKO!
PASS A MESSAGE ON TO KAKERU!
"DON'T LOSE!"

YOU CAN DO IT!
TAKAKO!
CLASS 2 IS FAST! THEY'VE JUST PASSED CLASS 6 AND ARE NOW IN FIRST PLACE!
TCH!
DO YOUR BEST.
PASS A MESSAGE ON TO KAKERU!
"DON'T LOSE!"

"REMEMBER THE DEAL!"
DO YOUR BEST!
SORRY...
PASS A MESSAGE ON TO KAKERU!
6

"REMEMBER THE DEAL!"
"DON'T LOSE!"
CLASS 6 HAS SLIPPED TO LAST PLACE!
"WE'LL ALWAYS BE TOGETHER!"
I knew it!
I FIGURED HAGITA WOULD BLOW IT!
AAAH!
DO YOUR BEST!

DO YOUR BEST!
DO YOUR BEST!
PASS A MESSAGE... ON TO KAKERU!
"DON'T LOSE!"
"REMEMBER THE DEAL!"
"WE'LL ALWAYS BE TOGETHER!"

"EVEN TEN YEARS FROM NOW!"
...EVERY-ONE.
THANK YOU...
...WE'LL CHANGE...
TOGETHER
I'LL GIVE HIM THE MESSAGE.
THIS WOULDN'T HAVE GONE WELL IF I'D BEEN ON MY OWN

KAKERU!
...THE FUTURE!
I HAVE A MESSAGE FROM EVERYONE!
"DON'T LOSE!"
"WE'LL ALWAYS BE TOGETHER!"
"REMEMBER THE DEAL!"

"EVEN TEN YEARS FROM NOW..."
"...WE'LL BE..."
"...WAITING FOR YOU!"

WE'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU!

3
RIGHT NOW, CLASS 2 IS IN THE LEAD!
THE ANCHORS ARE RUNNING THE FINAL LAP!
...AND ALL OF US WILL HELP YOU."
"IF THINGS ARE ROUGH, JUST SAY SO...
"I WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RELAY, TOO..."
"ME TOO."
"ME TOO!"
CLASS 6 IS CLOSING IN FROM BEHIND!
"I WANT TO RUN TOGETHER, TOO."
"IF IT'S HEAVY...
...YOU DON'T HAVE TO STRAIN YOURSELF AND CARRY THE WHOLE THING."
"ME TOO."

"WE'RE HERE TO HELP."
2

YEAHHH!
ワアア
CLASS 6 TAKES FIRST PLACE!
KAKERU, THAT WAS AWESOME!
YOU WERE GREAT, KAKERU!
AMAZING!
THANKS, KAKERU!
THAT WAS SO COOL, KAKERU!
KA-KERU...

YOU DID IT...
I'M SO HAPPY FOR YOU.

カシャ
FLASH
THE WINNER OF THE 21ST ATHLETIC FESTIVAL IS...
...THE RED TEAM!

THE RELAY...
...WAS WONDERFUL.
CONGRAT-ULATIONS.
IT'S THANKS TO THEM.
YOUR FATHER HAD JUST LEFT THE FAMILY...
...SO HE DIDN'T GO TO THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL.
YOU WERE BLUE THE WHOLE TIME.
THIS REMINDS ME OF THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL WHEN YOU WERE IN PRESCHOOL.
IT DOES?
YOUR MOTHER KEPT TAKING PICTURES...
...BUT SHE SAID SHE COULDN'T GET YOU TO SMILE FOR ONE OF THEM.

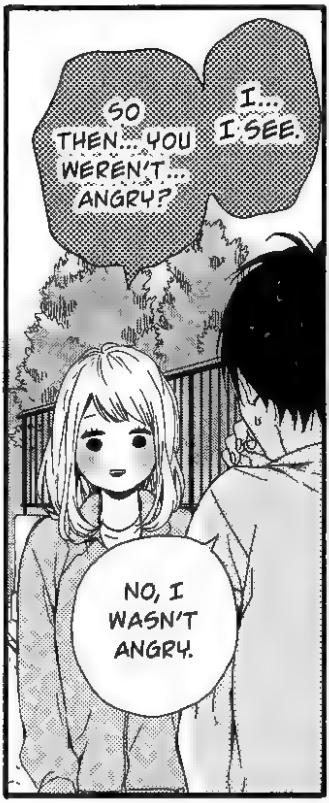
I FEEL TERRIBLE ABOUT IT.
TO HAVE HIS PARENTS DIVORCE WHEN HE'S THAT YOUNG...
I HOPE KAKERU IS OKAY.
YOUR MOTHER...
...WAS WORRIED ABOUT YOU THE WHOLE TIME.
WHEN YOUR MOTHER SAW THAT...
...SHE WAS SO HAPPY.
BUT...
...IN THE FINAL RACE...
...YOU WON FIRST PLACE, KAKERU.
1
YOU FINALLY...
...SMILED.

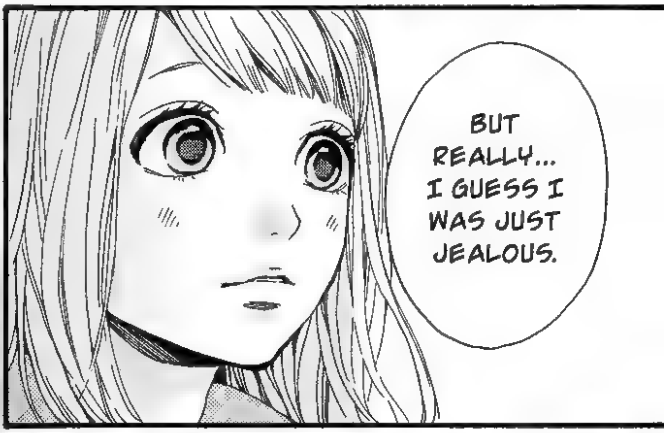
AND I'M SURE...
...SHE'S JUST AS HAPPY FOR YOU...
...RIGHT NOW.
I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT.
...YEAH.

MAKE THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL SO MUCH FUN THAT KAKERU WON'T EVEN THINK OF CRYING.
IT WORKED OUT...
...THIS WAY.
...UNSURPRISINGLY...
...BUT...
NOT EVERYTHING THAT WAS IN THE LETTER WAS CORRECT...
NAHO!
BRING KAKERU'S FAMILY TO THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL, TOO.
...THE LETTER STILL...
...WASN'T WRONG.

CAN I KEEP IT?
AH! THAT'S RIGHT!
ABOUT... ...THE HEAD-BAND...
SURE...
UM...
UH... I'M SORRY ABOUT THE WAY I ACTED...
...AT THE FIRST-AID STATION.
AH...
NO, I'M SORRY.
I MUST'VE SAID SOME-THING...

YOU GAVE FIRST-AID TO SUWA...
...AND I FELT... HOW CAN I PUT IT?
THAT IT WASN'T FAIR...
THAT WAS JUST...
...?
NO, IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, NAHO.


SO THEN... YOU WEREN'T... ANGRY?
I... I SEE.
NO, I WASN'T ANGRY.


BUT REALLY... I GUESS I WAS JUST JEALOUS.

I'M SORRY.

AH! HOW'S YOUR SCRAPE?
I HAVE BAND-AIDS.
WANT ONE?
BAND-AID
I SEE.
KAKERU WAS... JEALOUS...
That's silly...

DOES IT HURT?
NO...

I GOT MY REWARD.
THANKS.

...A LOT.

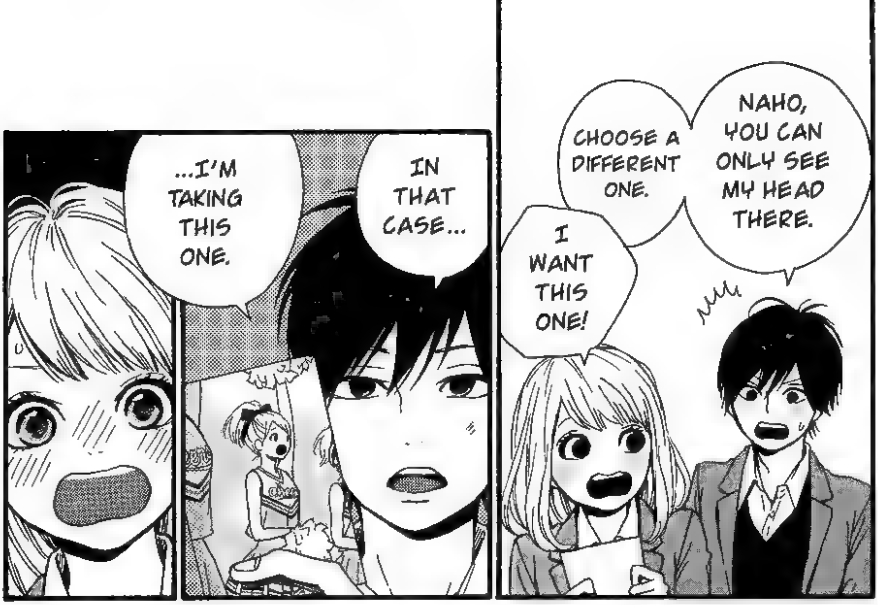
...IS CHANGING...

THE FUTURE...

CHAPTER 17

I BROUGHT THE PHOTOS...
...FROM THE ATHLETIC FESTIVAL.
LET ME KNOW IF YOU WANT ANY OF THEM.
I'LL PRINT OUT MORE COPIES AND BRING 'EM TOMORROW.
THANK YOUR DAD FOR US, SUWA!
I WANT THIS ONE AND THIS ONE...
I WANT THIS ONE.

AH... UM...
TH-THIS ONE...
HOW ABOUT YOU, NAHO?
WHICH ONE DO YOU WANT?
AH...
I WANT THAT ONE.


NAHO, YOU CAN ONLY SEE MY HEAD THERE.
CHOOSE A DIFFERENT ONE.
I WANT THIS ONE!
IN THAT CASE...
...I'M TAKING THIS ONE.

THEN GIVE THAT ONE BACK.
NO!!
B-BUT...
HEY, COME TO THINK OF IT...
...DID YOU EVER GET YOUR REWARD FROM NAHO FOR THE RELAY, KAKERU?

R...
REWARD?!
A KISS, REMEMBER?
A KISS.

IT WAS A KISS ON THE CHEEK...
SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO.
THAT'S OKAY.

I FORGOT ABOUT THAT.
Sorry.
Ah!
I HAVEN'T GOTTEN MY REWARD YET.

...AND I'M THE ONE WHO GOT IT.

YOU TRIED SO HARD SO YOU COULD GO OUT WITH AZU...
IT'S A SHAME YOU COULDN'T PASS TWO PEOPLE UP.
WELL, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE FORGOTTEN! I PASSED ONE PERSON UP!
I DIDN'T TRY HARD AT ALL!

OH, THAT'S RIGHT. THANK YOU, EVERYONE...
...FOR THE MESSAGE DURING THE RELAY.
I DON'T NEED IT!
SO INSTEAD, I'LL GIVE YOU A PHOTO OF AZU IN HER CHEERLEADER OUTFIT.
MY OWN PHOTO'S CUTER!
BUT WHAT DID YOU MEAN BY...
..."TEN YEARS FROM NOW"?
YOU'LL UNDERSTAND THAT PART...
...EVENTUALLY.

WHEN DID YOU SEE THAT?
A PHOTO?
YOUR GRANDMA SHOWED IT TO ME.
THIS SHOT OF KAKERU...
HE'S GOT THE SAME EXPRESSION IN A PHOTO FROM WHEN HE WAS A LITTLE KID.

YOUR MOM WAS IN THE PHOTO, TOO.
AND A DOG, I THINK?
YEAH. WE HAD ONE WHEN I WAS LITTLE.
SO, ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR MOM NOW...
I THINK IT'S ENOUGH JUST TO SHOW HER THAT YOU CAN SMILE LIKE THIS, FROM THE BOTTOM OF YOUR HEART.
THERE'S NO USE FEELING REGRETS OR APOLOGIZING.

SO THERE'S NO REASON...
...FOR YOU TO SUFFER ANYMORE.
...SAVE KAKERU.
WE CAN...

THAT'S THE FEELING I GET.
EVERY-THING WE'VE DONE UP TO NOW...
...IS LEADING TO A BRIGHT FUTURE.
THAT'S THE FEELING I GET.
KAKERU'S GRANDMA GAVE IT TO ME.
SHE SAID IT'S IN EXCHANGE FOR THE PHOTO I GAVE HER THAT WAS IN THE TIME CAPSULE.
HUH...
WHAT IS THAT?
WHAT?

I WANT TO APOLOGIZE TO KAKERU.
I WANT TO SAY I'M SORRY FOR STEALING HIS FUTURE.
FOR STEALING NAHO.
HUH?
YOU STOLE NAHO?
YOU WERE LIKE THAT BACK THEN?
OH, SHUT UP.
DID KAKERU KNOW...
...HOW NAHO FELT ABOUT HIM?

I HOPE...
...HE DID KNOW, THOUGH.
I DON'T KNOW.
YEAH.
I DIDN'T KNOW HOW NAHO FELT, EITHER...
...UNTIL AFTER KAKERU DIED.
I ONLY FOUND OUT HOW KAKERU FELT AFTER WORMING IT OUT OF HAGITA.
HUH? I TOLD YOU?
YOU WERE THE SOURCE OF ALL LEAKED SECRETS.
IF I'D ONLY REALIZED IT SOONER...
YEAH.
...I COULD'VE HELPED KAKERU.

SO...
...THERE WAS MORE THAN ONE PERSON IN LOVE WITH NAHO.
I WAS?
BUT SINCE I DIDN'T KNOW, I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT WHO TO CHEER ON.
IF I'D KNOWN KAKERU WAS GONNA DIE...
...I WOULD'VE BEEN IN HIS CORNER, NO QUESTION.
I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO KNEW...
...HOW BOTH NAHO AND KAKERU FELT.
I'M THE WORST.
WHAT THE HELL? NONE OF YOU WOULD'VE BEEN ON MY SIDE?
...
しーん..
SILENCE
SERI-OUSLY?

SURE IT IS.
THAT'S NOT TRUE, SUWA!
SHE'S RIGHT.
IT ISN'T TRUE, PAPA.
I ONLY PRETENDED THAT I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW THEY FELT.
BUT IF KAKERU HAD LIVED...
...HE AND NAHO WOULD'VE GOTTEN MARRIED IN THE FUTURE.
WHAT?!
IN HIGH SCHOOL?! WHEN?!
WHEN DID YOU DO THAT?!
...I WAS OVERJOYED.
WHEN YOU CONFESSED YOUR FEELINGS TO ME WHEN WE WERE STILL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS...
EVEN IF KAKERU HAD LIVED, I WOULD'VE MARRIED YOU, SUWA.

HAGITA, YOU IDIOT!
IT WAS ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, WASN'T IT?
WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE? IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO...
WHAT'RE YOU GONNA DO FOR CHRISTMAS EVE?
KAKERU AND NAHO, ARE YOU TWO GONNA SEE EACH OTHER?
HUH?!
YOU WANNA DO SOME-THING, YOU AND ME?
YEAH...
SPIT
THEN IT'S SETTLED!
AH...
YEAH!
ARE YOU FREE?

WHAT'S A "TWO-YEAR SHRINE VISIT"?
HOW ABOUT THE TWO-YEAR SHRINE VISIT? YOU WANNA ALL GO TOGETHER AGAIN THIS YEAR?
IT'S LIKE WE'RE DATING.
JUST THE TWO OF US ON CHRISTMAS EVE...
IT IS?!
IT'S A REGIONAL DIALECT TERM.
WHAT?! YOU DON'T KNOW?

THEN LET'S ALL GO TO THE SHRINE TOGETHER.

THE TWO OF YOU OUGHTA GO TO THE SHRINE TOGETHER ON NEW YEAR'S.

MMM... BUT...
...I WANNA GREET THE NEW YEAR WITH ALL YOU GUYS.

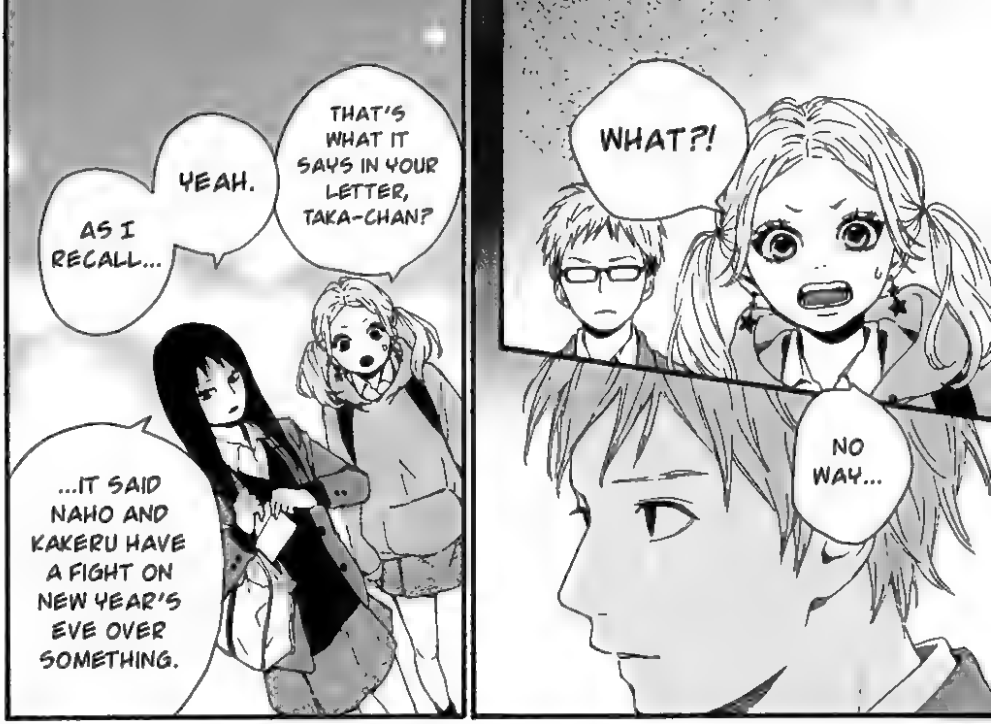
IT'S WHEN YOU VISIT A SHRINE BEFORE MIDNIGHT ON NEW YEAR'S EVE AND STAY UNTIL IT BECOMES NEW YEAR'S DAY.
HUH.

COME TO THINK OF IT...
...THERE'S SOMETHING I GOTTA DO ON NEW YEAR'S EVE.
FUKASHI SHRINE?
YOHA-SHIRA SHRINE?
WHICH ONE?
WHAT? ARE YOU SERIOUS?!
That sounds like a lie.
NO, I'M SERIOUS.
I CAN'T GO.
WHA...?
SHOULD WE PRAY FOR YOU, TOO? "PLEASE MAKE ME TALLER AGAIN THIS YEAR!"
I'M TALL ENOUGH AS IT IS!
SORRY.
YOU GUYS GO FOR ME.
WELL, I'M GOING HOME.
WELL, SHOULD WE...
...ALL GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS?
I gotta go to cram school, anyway.

NAHO!
HOW ABOUT GETTING A BEAN JAM PANCAKE?
?!
SURE...
Even though we just barely had sweets?
LET'S GO!
I'M BUYING!
BYE BYE!
HUH? JUST THE TWO OF US...?

OW!
WHAT THE HELL?!

MY LETTER SAYS...
...THAT YOU GO WITH US TO THE SHRINE ON NEW YEAR'S.
WHAT?
You're scary.
IT'S NOT A LIE...
YOU'RE LYING...
...ABOUT HAVING SOMETHING TO DO ON NEW YEAR'S.
WELL... SOMETIMES THE FUTURE CHANGES.
YOU'RE TRYING TO CHANGE IT, SUWA.
HUH?
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO...
...TELL NAHO HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT HER ON NEW YEAR'S EVE.


THAT'S WHAT IT SAYS IN YOUR LETTER, TAKA-CHAN?
YEAH.
AS I RECALL...
...IT SAID NAHO AND KAKERU HAVE A FIGHT ON NEW YEAR'S EVE OVER SOMETHING.
WHAT?!
NO WAY...

...A CRYING NAHO.
KAKERU GOES HOME...
...AND SUWA COMFORTS...

I'VE ALWAYS LO...
...IT'S OKAY.
HE DOESN'T HATE YOU... AND EVEN IF HE DID...
...KAKERU HATES ME...
I THINK...
I'M NOT GONNA DO THAT.
EVER.
ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO ERASE THAT?
BUT IT HAS TO DO WITH YOUR FUTURE WITH NAHO.
IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH HELPING KAKERU.
THERE'S NO NEED FOR ME TO TELL HER THAT, RIGHT?

MARRIED?
SUWA AND NAHO...?
THE FUTURE WHERE YOU AND NAHO GET MARRIED?

THAT'S...
...GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS WORLD!
...SEVERAL YEARS FROM NOW, SHE'LL BE IN LOVE WITH...
EVEN IF NAHO IS IN LOVE WITH KAKERU NOW...
THAT'S WHAT IT SAYS IN MY LETTER.
APPARENTLY, THAT CONFESSION OF HIS FEELINGS WAS THE TRIGGER.

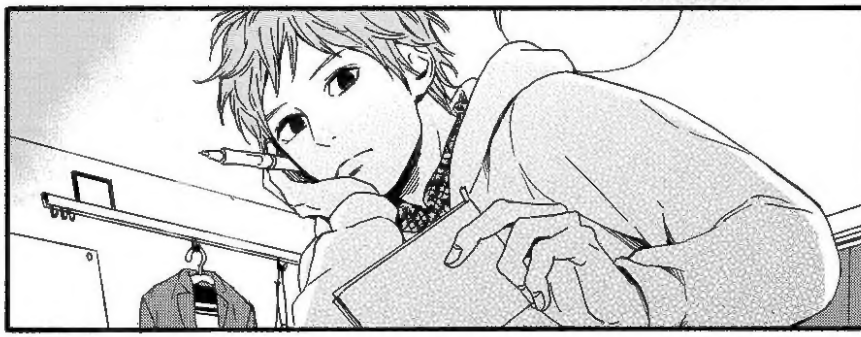
REMEMBER WHAT NAKANO-SENSEI...
...TOLD US ABOUT PARALLEL WORLDS.
THE WORLD WHERE OUR TEN-YEARS-OLDER SELVES SENT US LETTERS...
...AND THE WORLD WHERE WE RECEIVED THEM EXIST SEPARATELY.
EVEN IF I CHANGE THE FUTURE, NOTHING WILL CHANGE IN THE WORLD WHERE THEY SENT THE LETTERS.
WHEN NAHO AND I GOT MARRIED...
...WE CHOSE THAT PATH BECAUSE KAKERU WAS DEAD.
BUT IN THIS WORLD, I'M NOT GONNA CHOOSE THAT PATH.
THERE'S NO WAY I'M GONNA TELL NAHO HOW I REALLY FEEL ABOUT HER.
I'VE MADE UP MY MIND.

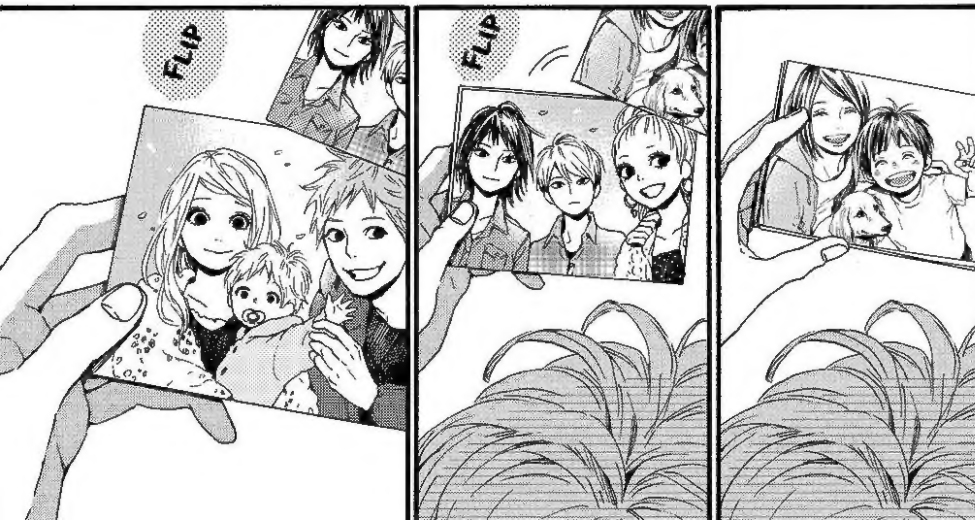
THE DAY KAKERU DIES...
THEY TOLD US THE DAY.
THEY GAVE US A CHANCE TO CHANGE THE FUTURE.

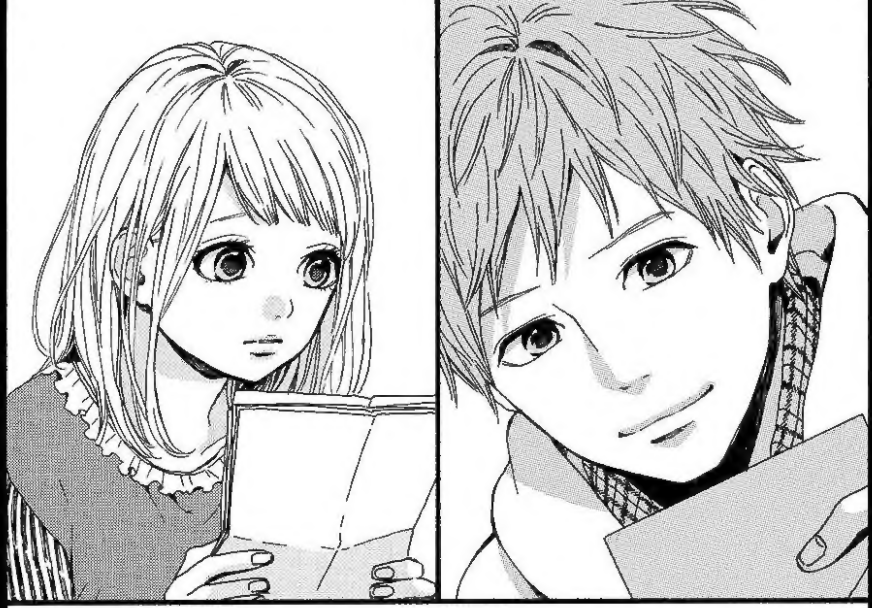
THE HAPPINESS OUR FUTURE SELVES WRITE ABOUT...

...IS OUR **PRESENT.**

THEY TAUGHT US THAT EVEN OUR DAILY LIVES, WHICH WE TAKE FOR GRANTED, ARE PRECIOUS.







DECEMBER 31ST

WE ALL GO TO THE SHRINE TOGETHER AS PLANNED.
KAKERU AND I HAVE A FIGHT.
FROM THIS DAY ON, THERE'S SOME KIND OF DISTANCE BETWEEN KAKERU AND ME.
WE DON'T TALK AS MUCH ANYMORE.

I NEVER GOT TO APOLOGIZE TO KAKERU BEFORE HE DIED.